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MMOZine

Issue 37 | March 2012

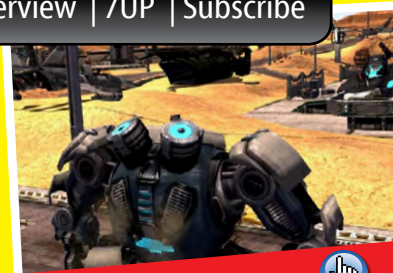
Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, S…our mates

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW AND PREVIEW

THE SECRET WORLD

WE OPEN THE DOOR TO FUNCOM'S MMO

PLUS WE GO HANDS-ON WITH GUILD WARS 2'S RANGER IN AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW!



+ PREVIEW

Line of Defense

MMOFPS warfare!

+ PREVIEW

Salem

A daring new sandbox MMO

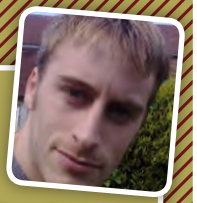
+ PREVIEW

End of Nations

Petroglyph show us something new!

AION

Welcome to MMOZine



Innovative MMOs are like buses, you wait years for a release to try something different and then two come along at once! Cringeworthy intro aside, this month we're dreadfully excited to bring you two genre-defining titles in Funcom's The Secret World and ArenaNet's Guild Wars 2. Both games are looking to transform the MMO genre with sophisticated combat, exciting story-based campaigns and a disregard for traditional online game design.

The days of everyone trying so hard to emulate World of Warcraft are officially over, and we genuinely cannot be happier about it! Also of note this month is another preview of End of Nations, which is nearing release. We also look at a new historical sandbox MMO, Salem. Who said this genre is predictable?

Andy Griffiths, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

DAVID SCAMMELL
Still believes in the 'Underpants Gnomes' conspiracy.

DEAN MORTLOCK
Revisits his glory days as a C&C general.

DON'T MISS!

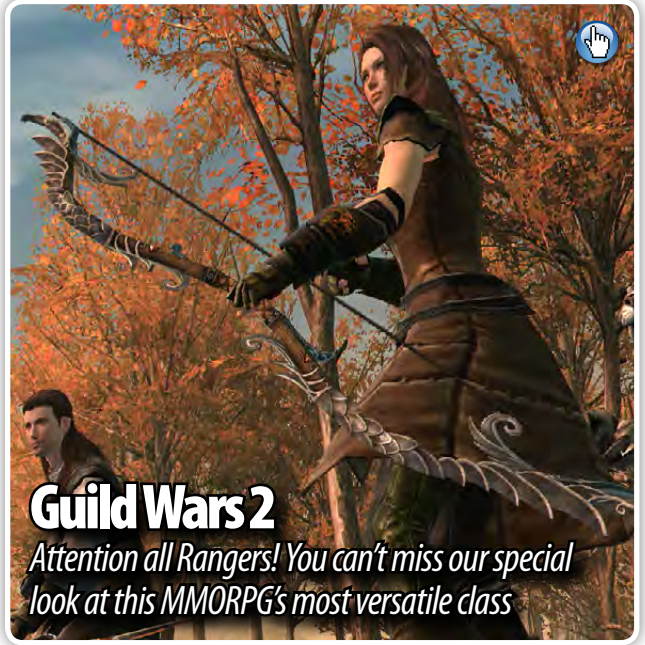
This month's highlights…

THE SECRET WORLD

Exclusive supersized preview and interview!

End of Nations

Salem



Guild Wars 2

Attention all Rangers! You can't miss our special look at this MMORPG's most versatile class

QUICK FINDER

Every page is just a click away

Lime Odyssey: The Chronicles of Orta
Line of Defense
Final Fantasy XIV
Forsaken Worlds
TERA
Everquest
Earthrise
Rift
The Secret World
Guild Wars 2
Salem
End of Nations

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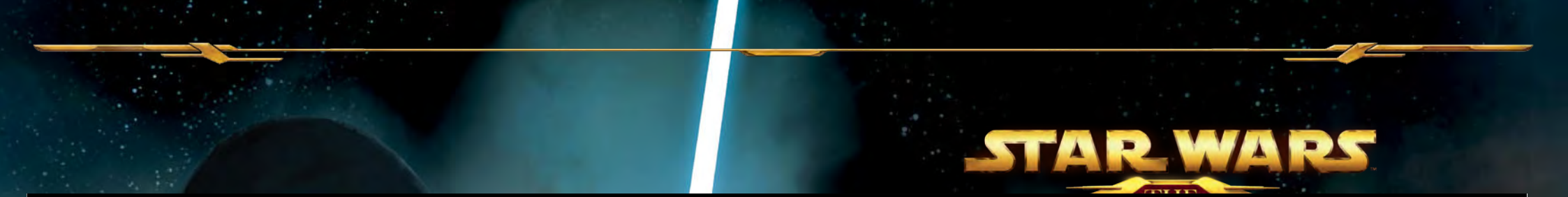

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Hi Def Video

Lime Odyssey: The Chronicles of Orta

FIRST LOOK

Can the real Ragnorak 2 please stand up?

Publisher: Aeria Games
Developer: Sirius Entertainment
Heritage: N/A
Link: http://limeodyssey.aeriagames.com
ETA: 2012

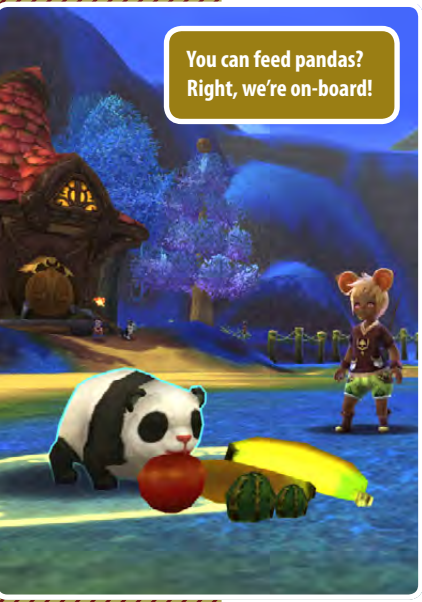
PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Lime Odyssey

What's the story?

Take one look at Lime Odyssey's charming visuals and you'll see more than a passing resemblance to the sprite-based free-to-play juggernaut that is known as Ragnorak Online, and frankly it's no coincidence. The soft pastel colours, the cutesy take on the human form, the bright and breezy atmosphere… it's no wonder gamers from the East are calling this MMORPG the true successor to 'The Big R'. Yet while development is stalling on Gravity's sequel, Sirius Entertainment's unofficial follow-up is going from strength to strength, so we thought we'd tell you a little bit more about it.

What's it all about?

All the action is set in the continent of Orta which is home to three races: humans, small but clever Muris and the tough felines known as Turga. These different societies must work together in order to find Lime fruit scattered around the world, which when collected grants ungodly amounts of energy. The back story is as obtuse as Korean fantasy gets, but there are four easy to understand classes, with Mage, Warrior, Cleric and Thief selections to be made, and professions to specialise in such as Tailor, Blacksmith and Chef.



When do we get more?

As you can tell there's still much more to learn about Lime Odyssey and the details we have learnt so far don't fill us with too much confidence. That said, the team behind the game consists of some of Korea's most celebrated MMO makers as well as the composer for the legendary Chronotrigger, Mitsuda Yasunori. Lime Odyssey is currently in closed Beta, and we'll let you know if it's more than just a pretty face.

Hi Def Video

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Line of Defense

FIRST LOOK

War on an unprecedented scale

Publisher: 3000AD
Developer: In-house
Heritage: Galactic Command Online, Angle of Attack, Battlecruiser Millennium
Link: http://lodmmo.com
ETA: Summer 2012

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Line of Defense

Barry doesn't let anyone touch his mech, not even his mum.

What's the story?

Despite the flurry of MMO first-person shooters heading to our rigs over the next year, there's never been a game which has successfully delivered on the premise of hundreds of soldiers and vehicles all facing off against each other on 100-kilometre wide battlefields in order to determine a common victor. The promise of uninstanced PvP on a grand scale is something few developers have ever tried to tackle, yet 3000AD are looking to do exactly that with the free-to-play sci-fi MMO, Line of Defense.

How will it work?

Basically battles will be orchestrated on giant 16km by 16km continents, with two factions tasked with fighting to capture and own three different bases at any one time. Each battle and map will be persistent, so not only will the battle evolve naturally over time, but players can make a lasting impression on the battlefield by deploying defensive turrets, bases and even player housing. We haven't learned the details of how the economy will work, but there will be tons of different weapons, vehicles and attachments to help your team.

An XP-based progression system will feature, unlocking new vehicles and equipment for procurement whenever a player reaches a new combat threshold. That said, even newbies will be able to take down an established veteran, as base level units will still be very powerful. There's even the ability to purchase AI team-mates to fight alongside you if your real friends aren't up to the task.

Imagine this scenery, only wrought with war!

There seems to be dozens of different mech, aircraft and weapon designs.

When do we get more?

Your guess is as good as ours. A lot of LoD's features tend to pose more questions than they answer, and 3000AD still haven't revealed how many players will be able to play on a single server. No matter, we're still excited to see how this intriguing venture plays out and aesthetically at least the MMOFPS seems on the right track.

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7UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!

Final Fantasy XIV

Developer: Square-Enix | **ETA:** Out Now

After taking in plenty of feedback, Square have confirmed that this MMO's planned server mergers will go ahead prior to the launch of the 2.0 update. Bringing this MMO back from the brink will be tough, but the devs are committed to the cause.

TERA

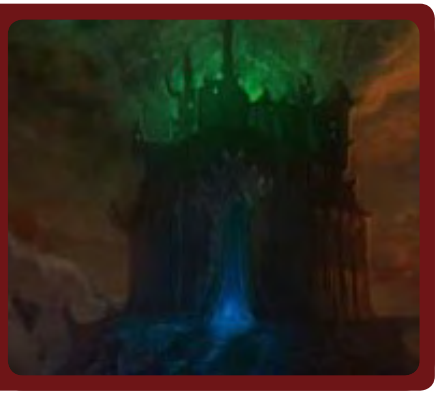
Developer: Bluehole Studio | **ETA:** Out Now

Over the past month Frogster have announced the Beta scheduled for TERA, with special closed Beta weekends all through March concluding with an open weekend on April 19th-22nd. The Sneak Peek event was a bit of a disaster but all of the gremlins now seem to have been worked out. Active targeting isn't as easy to implement as it appears.

Forsaken Worlds

Developer: Perfect World Entertainment | **ETA:** Out Now

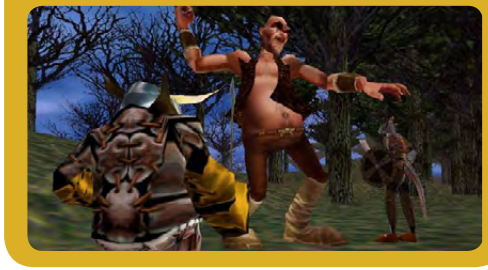
The free-to-play fantasy MMO Forsaken Worlds is getting a new expansion. Nightfall features new environments to explore in Eyrda, along with new bosses, monsters, skills and most impressively of all, flight! The new traversal powers look awesome and should lead to much more enjoyable exploration.



Everquest

Developer: SOE | **ETA:** Out Now

After almost 13 years in service, Sony has confirmed that Everquest will adopt a free-to-play model later this month. A redesigned website, new events and improved map functionality will also be added to ease newbies into the game. It's about time, Sony!



Rift

Developer: Trion Worlds | **ETA:** Out Now

Did you do anything special on Valentine's Day? You didn't? Well we didn't either, but apparently a lot of other gamers did. 21,879 marriages were conducted in Rift on February 14th, granting Trion World's MMO the Guinness World Record for most in-game marriages conducted in 24 hours. Wow, suddenly we feel inescapably lonely. Next Valentine's Day will be different…

ON THE RADAR

2012
- Guild Wars 2

SUMMER
- Tribes Ascend

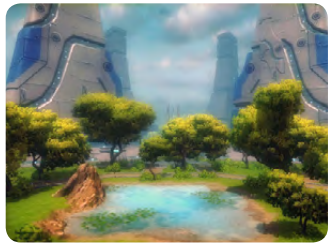
APRIL
- The Secret World

MARCH
- Allods Online: Overture of the Damned

Guild Wars 2

Developer: NCsoft | **ETA:** 2012

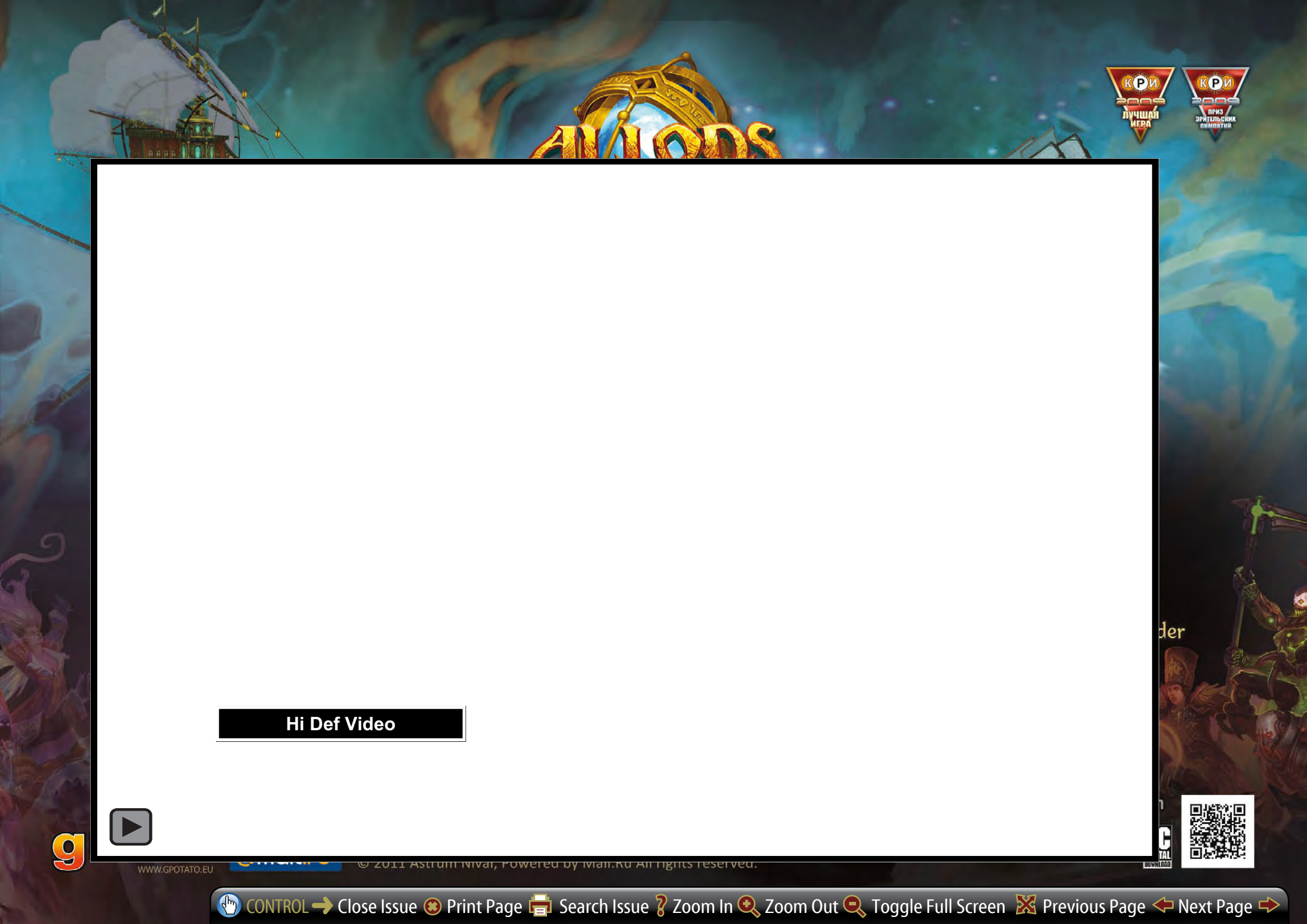
ArenaNet has outlined how their daring world vs world game mode will work. Basically, these massive server vs server skirmishes take place on a series of maps, each of which can support over 300 players, with battles taking place over two weeks to determine a victor. So far only a few of the maps have been revealed, but effectively players will be expected to assault/defend massive castles and keeps with an array of different siege weaponry, to secure win bonuses for their server. Frankly it sounds nuts and until we get a chance to experiment we won't be sure how it all works. Nevertheless it's still exciting to hear about something new in the PvP realm.



Earthrise

Developer: Masthead Studios | **ETA:** N/A

After an unsuccessful launch and a botched transition to a free-to-play model, Earthrise servers have now closed. Unfortunately its early failings condemned it to a premature passing to MMO heaven. Rest in peace.



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THE SECRET WORLD

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Funcom Productions
Heritage: Age of Conan, Anarchy Online
Link: www.thesecretworld.com
ETA: 19th June

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of The Secret World

The Secret World

Defying expectations

There's something wrong with MMORPGs, isn't there? Between tired fantasy conventions and dull as dishwater 'click to win' quest design, gamers are beginning to see the cracks between the design slabs and yearn for something more. An experience which not only offers lots of combat, but a genuinely new setting with a plot which doesn't just seem like an excuse to grind our valuable free-time away, and quests which require us not just to fight, but to think as well.

Despite that, these thoughts continually ran through our minds while playing The Secret World, because it's so much more than another cut and paste WoW clone. It's genuinely a breath of fresh air with a load of fantastically implemented ideas.

The most noticeable innovation is the setting, as TSW is set in a seedy version of the modern-day dominated by three secret societies which are fighting back the forces of the occult. During our immersion day, we enrolled as member of the Illuminati – a society which isn't as spiritual as the Dragon or as serious as the Templars – who are looking to make some money, get ahead and if possible stop dark forces from crossing dimensions and invading society. So far, so good.

After selecting our faction we were shown an in-engine cut-scene of our character experiencing his 'magical awakening' and was subsequently approached by a smooth-talking handler who told us of a place he knew we'd fit right in, only we'd have to earn our way first. He sent us to a sweaty and unattractive conspiracy theorist who hung out in a laundromat, because the 'filth' wouldn't be able to hear his bizarre musings. This deliberate fun-poking proved an apt introduction to The Secret World, as despite the grounded subject matter, this really isn't an MMO that takes itself too seriously. There's a jovial and cheeky nature to the game which is genuinely endearing, and even

Monster difficulty is always rated between 1-5, and ratings aren't skewed towards an individual's skill or power.

Signs of secret societies are everywhere, you just have to look hard enough.

The Secret World cont.

the introductory quest has that element to it. Only gently nudging the player in the right direction rather than displaying directions outright, via the mini-map or HUD. After finding surveillance equipment for our nervous friend we were sent down an elaborate maze to gain entry into Illuminati HQ, where we got to mess around with the three different combat options – magic, melee and guns – as well as meet our domineering female contact.

TSW is very much a story-led experience, with in-game cut-scenes and lengthy monologues. However, unlike The Old Republic's attempts at prioritising story, these long conversations don't bog the game down. Instead spoken dialogue only interjects when necessary, and you'll be glad when it does thanks to some great characters, genuinely funny banter and varied cinematic direction. Of course, whether that's the case after a hundred hours remains to be seen, but we will say that the Illuminati's 'corporate but cool' nature definitely made a good impression on us.

After selecting an all-guns no-nonsense combat build and experiencing a short tutorial section featuring a dimensional shift in a Toyko subway, we were unceremoniously transported to Egypt – an area it would take an average player around 70 hours to get to, but we were tight on time. It's a shame we missed the rest of New York and an exciting finale to the opening act which leads to all factions heading to the Solomon Islands, but Funcom want to keep that particular gameplay nugget under wraps until the game is on shelves. However gaining access to a significantly sandier location did give us a flavour of how the nuts and bolts of The Secret World experience would play out.

"Unlike SWTOR's attempts at prioritising story, these long conversations don't bog the game down"

The Scorched Desert

Our experience of New York was brief and linear, but in the afternoon we had free reign to do whatever we wanted in an area of Egypt

THE ANKH

During our immersion day we had time to sample two of TSW's nine dungeons. The first, titled 'The Ankh', involved as many as five players taking down an evil scientist who spawned in a myriad of Egyptian monsters using a special artefact. Like TSW's main campaign there was all the hallmarks of the core MMORPG experience here, only with a slight twist. One set-piece involved our group of adventurers fighting across a bridge, as a rampaging multi-storey monster continually walked forward to pressure us towards an unopened gateway. Getting close to him resulted in an almost instant death, so we had to chip away at his HP before he'd cave our skulls in! Also of note were flying pink orbs which would latch onto team-mates disabling their attacks, before subsequently exploding. We won't mention how many times we wiped due to those little blighters.

Players can only equip 14 skills, half passive and half active, so choose carefully.

HELL FALLEN

Now this dungeon was certainly the easier of the two showcased during our hands-on session, but it still required a very patient member of Funcom to guide our way through it. Our merry band journeyed to the Hell dimension in order to help a friend of a demon we happened to meet in Egypt.

Unfortunately the set-pieces weren't as fancy as 'The Ankh' but there were the occasional curveball moments, such as lava-spewing bosses which would flood an entire area with little warning, human-sized ninja rats and 'Hell Wind' which caused damage whenever a player wasn't in the safety of cover. There was a really interesting story at work as well involving a time-travelling human and a grand biblical war, but we were too busy trying not to die to pay attention.

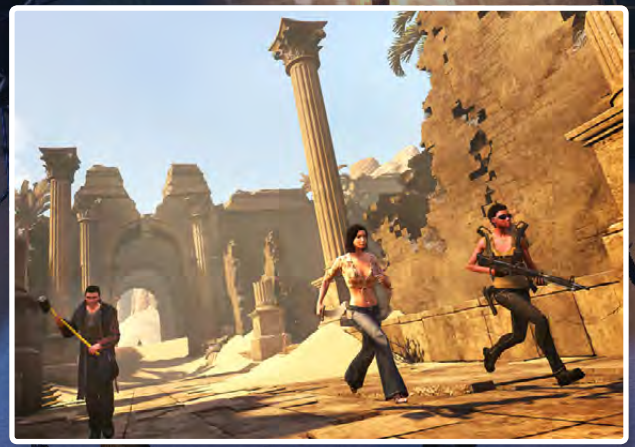
The Secret World cont.

which had been destabilised by occult preachers and a mysterious figure who was twisting proceedings to his own ends. Our handler, a British-sounding immortal mummy who had done and seen it all, told us to head out into the open-world wilderness to discover what exactly was going on, but rather than doing that we decided to mess around with some support quests and get our head around combat.

Boasting a short-range shotgun and a long-range assault rifle, our build wasn't exactly what you'd call 'default' in the MMO genre, but TSW isn't exactly a regular MMO. Rather than boasting a traditional archetype-based and levelling-up system, players simply plough their regularly earned Skill and Action Points into a character's skill wheel, unlocking new skills and powering up their abilities as they go. It reminded us a lot of hitting the level cap in Guild Wars, yet the skill points here are offered up with much greater frequency. and seeing the wheel gradually fill out is much more satisfying than just notching up another number in an arbitrary scale. Players unlock skills in a linear fashion along their chosen specialisation, but where the expertise comes in is bolstering your skill bar out appropriately with only one elite skill selectable. There are over 588 different abilities in total spread over eight different weapon proficiencies, so there's lots to think about.

"There's a British-sounding immortal mummy who had done and seen it all"

Rather than being based on just raw strength alone, TSW's combat is based around momentum, with players accumulating limited time buffers, or 'builders', as they put down enemy after enemy. The result is that your health and damage gets buffed continually with seconds-long bonuses, thus making your character more formidable. This system actively encourages fighting groups of enemies at the same time, and can lead to some really empowering pay-offs, but there's also the tendency to wipe as you bite off more than you can chew.



Hi Def Video

THE SECRET WORLD

The Secret World cont.

Combat may have led to some scratching of heads, at least at first, but by far the most intellectually stimulating area of The Secret World was its quest design.

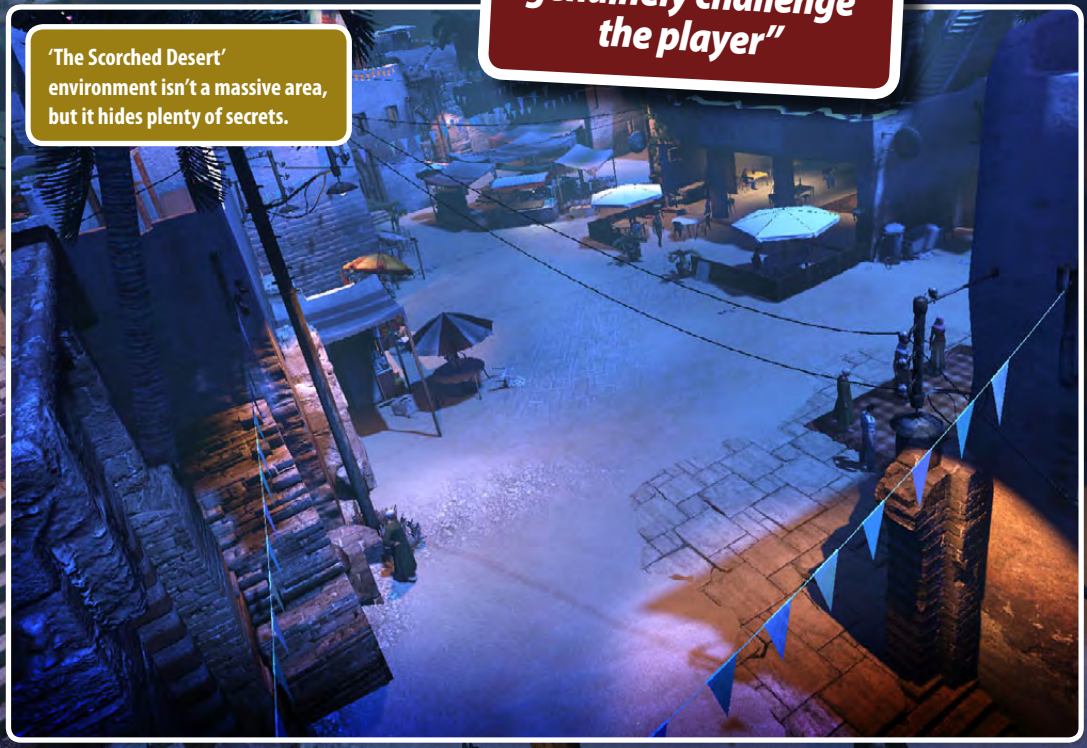
Now before we alluded that objectives usually didn't ordain exactly where you should go, but rather point you in the right direction, and Egypt's activities certainly fit that description. Basically missions are broken down in the following types: sabotage, action, investigation and story. Now the main quest we sampled definitely came under the action label, with our merry band made to follow a 'suspicious' believer to a temple, don some suitable attire, gain entry and disrupt a ceremony – not the most unusual MMO activity in the world. Funcom's latest has these sorts of activities, but what really get our blood pumping was an investigation side-quest.

Now these aren't filler activities which involve collecting X of Y, instead side quests are set to genuinely challenge the player. We embarked on an investigation mission which required gaining entry to a recently deceased individual's house in order to hack into his PC. Due to his shifting off the mortal coil we couldn't pressure him into 'handing' over a password, so we utilised TSW's in-game browser to decipher a password reminder on the NPC's PC. After a quick googling of the hint 'Gold-Bug' and 'Poet' via the fully functional in-game browser we found the famous poet the hint was referring to via Wikipedia and entered the password successfully. Our success was short-lived though as after that we were let loose on another fact-finding trail, which this time to do with a sequence of mystery numbers.

Adding an un-gated browser in an MMO is such a simple thing, yet the way it's utilised to break the fourth wall when playing TSW is definitely worth applauding. Unexpected gameplay elements were also offered in the guise of sabotage missions which required players to avoid spotlights, patrols, lasers and alarms in order to not attract enemy attention. These special facilities aren't located

Funcom has certainly captured the feel of Egypt – at least how it feels in movies.

"Side quests are set to genuinely challenge the player"



'The Scorched Desert' environment isn't a massive area, but it hides plenty of secrets.

THE SECRET WORLD

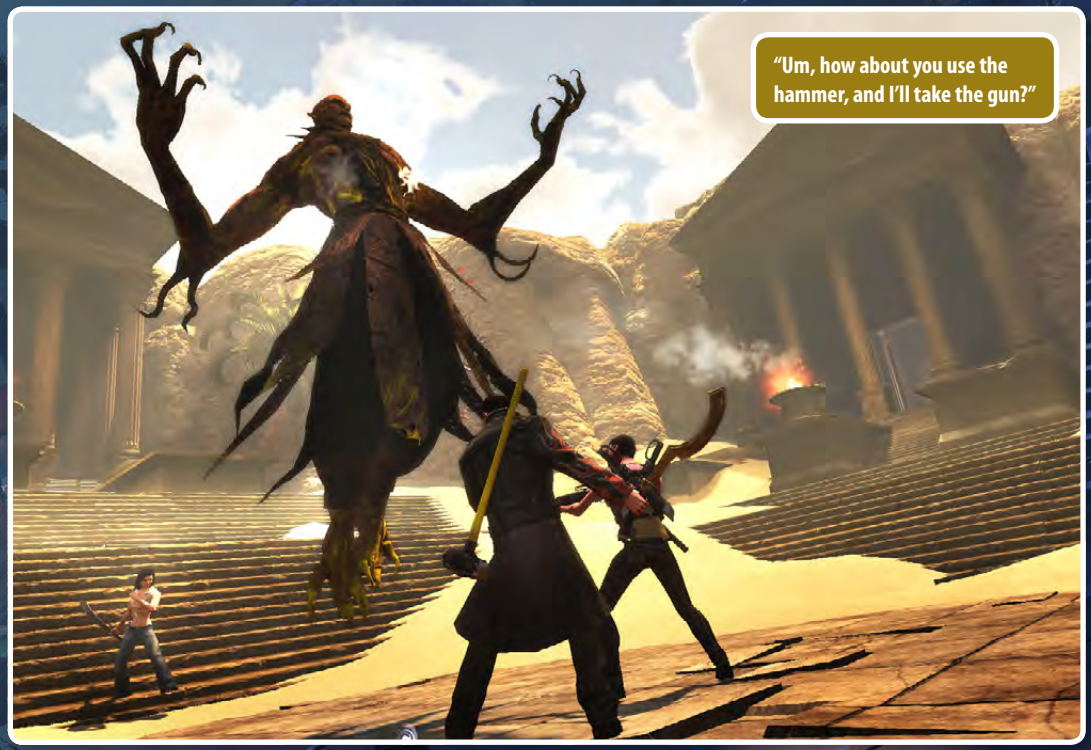
The Secret World cont.

in instanced areas, instead they exist in the world persistently as either complexes or houses, so if you just happen upon them while going about your business, you can decide to infiltrate. We constantly felt compelled to explore every nook and cranny of these bleeping buildings just to see if we could deactivate an alarm placed suspiciously next to an open window, or escape before guards came running in.

By offering up a 'level-less' progression system, Funcom have given themselves room to create no-go areas which require players to avoid enemy attention or they'll quickly die. If sufficient bonuses are offered to enable this trial and error gameplay to be worthwhile then we imagine lots of fans will have a blast with this special mission type.

These sorts of quests certainly aren't for gamers looking for a sedate MMO experience, but those who are willing to engage and invest will have an absolute blast trying to unlock these considerable brain teasers. We just hope there's enough of them.

We've only seen a brief slice of what the final version of The Secret World will actually be, with key features such as crafting and PvP completely missing from the sampled build, yet we couldn't help but feel very excited by what we had played. Funcom's first MMO since Age of Conan is bursting with new ideas, maturity and an trusting approach which doesn't hold the player's hand at all times. Add this notion with quality dialogue, an intriguing premise and novel gameplay and you have an experience which we think will inevitably change the way people perceive MMOs.



MMOZine Verdict

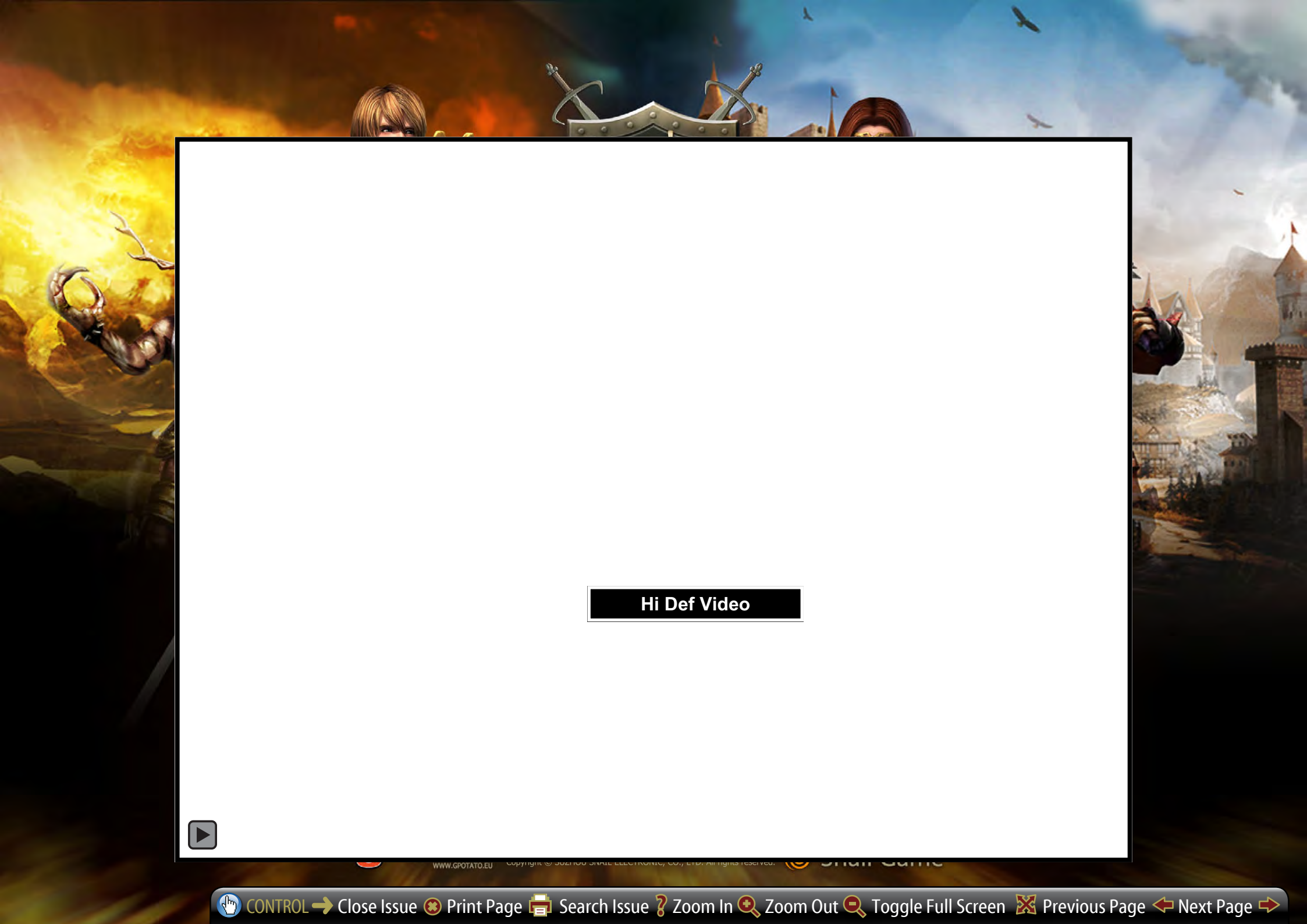
Innovative, stylish and set to transform the MMO landscape as we know it

HOW COMPLETE

80%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%



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Through the looking glass

We speak to Joel Bylos, Lead Content Designer for the innovative MMORPG, The Secret World

What we played today was really refreshing, and sported the sort of innovations the MMO genre has needed for some time. Is that what you guys think?
Yeah, there's nothing wrong with the traditional MMO. There's the WoW style MMO and TOR does that very well – it's a good game. I think Rift did it very well, but I'm a bit tired of playing the same game in every new game, if you want. It's time to kick on! Guilds War 2 is doing it; they're doing things which are pushing the envelope, and we made some decisions about how players approach our game – it isn't supposed to be just about killing stuff or clicking on an object to get something. We wanted to give it a bit more depth.

If the sight of all these words causes a knot to form in your uncultured stomach, simply click on the media below to listen to Joel's thoughts in all their unedited glory.

TSW's combat combines real-world weapons with magic.

A lot of developers tend to shy away from setting their MMOs in the real-world, but why do you think that is?
I think there's something about making sure that things capture the feeling people have from seeing them in pop culture. New York needs to feel like New York, and Egypt needs to feel like Egypt, but not just the Egypt we're making, but the Egypt Hollywood has sold to the world. In some ways it's easier because there's more reference material on New York than you can poke a stick at.

On the other hand it's more difficult because people always have a perception of a place, but the good news is the feedback we've gotten so far is that people feel like it works. People from New York have told us, "Yeah I recognise that area" and people from Maine have told us that even the way our characters speak in Maine is 100 per cent accurate.

The mixing of fantasy and sci-fi tropes is really interesting too…
But appropriate to that, sci-fi and fantasy actually takes a lot of cues from the real-world too, and we build everything in-game from history, myth and legends in the real world.

Is there a danger of some conspiracy theories in-game coming across as too camp?
I think Ragnar [Tørnquist] always says, "It's fine to go with cliché" because people recognise cliché, and it's the twists on cliché that are the most interesting parts and you have to make it work. Ragnar keeps a pretty tight rein on how

things feel, and I think there is a limit to how campy it gets. I think the humour in the game; we try to not put the humour into the gameplay. We don't have NPCs that are called Paris Hilton or Haris Pilton if you want to go the World of Warcraft route, we don't take it to that level.

The humour comes from the dialogue and the things that you recognise. For example, one girl you talk to says, "If you want to know how low humanity can sink, all you need to do is read the comments on YouTube." That's a discussion I've had at the office, and that really grounds the game in our world, but it's true! That's where the humour comes from, it's all about building a world full of characters which are funny in their own right.

The Secret World's quest design is also really novel, as the objective instructions don't always point you in exactly the right direction, which isn't what MMO players expect. You need to think about what you're doing rather than just following instructions, was that always the goal from the start?

Yeah, I would never classify The Secret World as casual, it's a fairly hardcore game. We're making this game, we're all gamers and this is the sort of game we want to make! The Secret World is hard, but is it the bad sort of hard? You're a good developer when you make a game where people are frustrated with themselves when they can't beat something, as opposed to being angry at you. If they're frustrated with you, then you really aren't doing your job properly.

> *"Hardcore games are fine; people don't have a problem with them"*

Dark Souls is the perfect example that hardcore games are fine, and that people don't have a problem with them. What they do have a problem with is being too obtuse. I think WoW took some of the obtuse elements of Everquest and made them less obtuse, and suddenly the game was super popular. WoW has its hardcore elements though – the top-level players who are grinding out the best raids. I just think we aren't trying to cater to everybody, we have our specific core. We want people who are up for chaining abilities and switching out builds. We want people who are into three-way factional PvP and we're making a game for those people.

There was one quest in particular today which brought out our hardcore nature. The goal required us to search for the term Gold-Berg on Wikipedia and it took us around 15 minutes to figure it all out. It was really difficult, but it was really interesting to have that sort of challenge.

Even the in-game version of London feels like London.

Was it more rewarding when you solved it?

It was, and it made people talk to each other about how to solve it, but the problem is as soon as TSW goes live you have guides and that kind of

The Illuminati have the tools and the talent to control any occult outbreak.

Interview continued

romance around, those kinds of brain teasers goes away…
You can spoil the game for yourself but you can do that with any game. World of Warcraft has that with raid guides. In some ways raids are a puzzler on their own with gameplay, movement and strategy, but it's still a puzzle.

I think it's okay that if people get frustrated they can use the browser to get past any point or talk to somebody in the game, but what I think is interesting is that in the Beta people don't do that. People type in chat, "I'm stuck, can I get a hint please? Do not tell me the answer." And they get private tells and if people talk about puzzles in global chat, other people tell them "Shut up, don't talk about this in global chat." The players are enforcing this themselves which I feel is interesting and very mature. I feel like our game draws in a mature audience too. I hope our community is going to be made up of people who are there for the puzzles, the setting and the story. The Secret World isn't a game focused on just achieving all the time, so hopefully people will be there for some fun too.

A lot of MMORPGs offer CPU-controlled henchmen to help guide players through the world, thus eliminating the need to rely on an active community. Do you think lacking that sort of feature allows you to a foster a much more social player-base?
It's hard to say. We don't have pets and companions simply because those don't work very well in our tech and it isn't the right decision for us to go that way. It would be weird for us to create these characters who feel as though they belong in the world and then have a guy who doesn't really do what you'd expect a real person would do. I think in terms of challenge, the game will be hard and people will group up.

One of the interesting things to note is that every mission, except for the puzzle missions, is repeatable with a one-day cooldown. You can do them over and over again, and what that means is that if you find a mission too difficult, you just find one from before that you liked and do it again. You'll get enough skill points to keep going! I call it a 'soft difficulty curve' because the game gets easier as you play.

Most games have you start at level one, get to level 10 in four hours, get to level 40 in 50 more hours, etc. Our game actually starts with players getting access to three skills, and to unlock a new skill point takes the whole bar to fill up and that value never changes. So getting those skill points can take 30 minutes, whereas the second time it'll take 29 minutes, by the end of the game you're gaining a new skill point every five minutes and you're able to purchase skills more quickly, but of course they cost more. You actually speed up your progress in the end by playing more.

Tanks move slowly but can dish out a fair amount of destructive power.

"I hope our community is going to be made up of people who are there for the puzzles, the setting and the story"

Hi Def Video

Publisher: NCsoft
Developer: ArenaNet
Heritage: Guild Wars
Link: www.guildwars2.com
ETA: 2012

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Guild Wars 2

Guild Wars 2

Tyria as you've never seen it before

"We were addicted to what was an effortlessly stylish online experience"

EXCLUSIVE VIDEOS!

It's always a special moment when a developer decides that they're comfortable enough with their own creation that gamers can begin enjoying it in their own home, and that feeling of excitement is doubled when it's one of the biggest MMO releases of the year. Gaining access to Guild Wars 2 for just a short weekend was bittersweet, as we knew our character would be confined to the great recycling bin in the sky. Nevertheless, we still got well and truly addicted to what was an effortlessly stylish online experience.

Despite making massive changes to the core Guild Wars formula, booting up the sequel still felt like a historically resonant experience, mostly due to Jeremy Soule's fantastic fantasy score. You can't help but feel pumped up about your adventure, and that feeling only gets heightened as you select your character, carefully choose their back story and witness a purpose-built intro tailored to your decisions.

We selected a Charr Ranger and subsequently needed to choose our pet, legion alliance, sparring partner

Thanks to advancing the setting hundreds of years, GW2's combat feels much more interesting than the usual fantasy trappings.

CHARACTER CREATION

GW2's character creator lacks the customisation depth of other MMOs, but it still manages to make you feel attached to your character before you set foot in the world of Tyria. The multiple choice questions make a real impact on the story, ordaining who your main AI partner is and your main motivation for your character's continued existence. The Charr story is riddled with legions battling it out for supremacy when they should be taking out ghosts.

Seeing an environment as mind-bending as this has become common place in Tyria.

Guild Wars 2 cont.

and other personal choices. The stitched together intro movie makes you feel attached to your creation before you've even started adventuring, but it only gets better from there.

That aforementioned sense of historical precedent reached new heights when we got into the game as we bore witness to the ongoing battle between the Charr and the ghostly fallen human warriors which occupy the ruins of Ascalon and the surrounding Plains of Ashford. Walking around this area caused us to double take as we noticed familiar landmarks such as collapsed columns and statues now utterly ruined. After taking down more ghosts than Dr. Venkman and co. we explored the Charr capital city dubbed Black Citadel, built upon the ruins of Rin, which centres around a multi-storey circular orb. So few MMOs get cities right, but as ever ArenaNet have crafted a vibrant and varied urban environment which boasted lots of lore statues, vendors and portals which transported our adventurer to other capitals across Tyria or to special PvP arenas.

This version of Tyria, which is set hundreds of years after the original, is a much more varied and interesting world to explore, purely because of the advancement the Asuran tech has brought to the world. During several quests we were introduced to the marvels of shotguns, pistols and auto-targeting turrets even though our class wasn't proficient

Every lake and river is fully explorable, with its own set of combat, weaponry, treasures and enemies.

SCOUTS

Having NPCs tell you where to go in a persistent world isn't new, but the way Guild Wars 2 does it is the most affective mechanism we've ever sampled in an MMO. Basically, the way it works is that whenever you venture into a new region, you'll spot a looking glass on the map which indicates a location of an NPC scout. When you interact with this individual they'll give you an interactive tour of the local area pointing out quest locations, points of interest and a little backstory of that particularly environment. It's very sleek and informative.

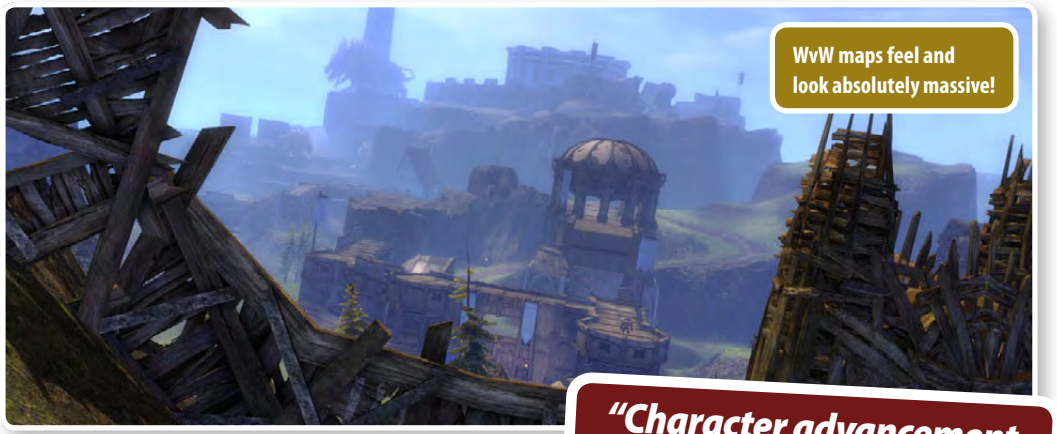
Guild Wars 2 cont.

in them. Obviously they were taken away as soon as the requisite quests were complete, but it was still rewarding to try something new.

That isn't to say the Ranger is as rigidly committed to the bow and arrow as before, instead you can wield daggers, swords, throwable axes, a Warhorn and a two-handed sword. Rather than purchasing skills from trainers, you unlock new abilities as you accumulate more kills with your profession's weaponry. This is a fantastic system as it means you'll unlock new abilities while out in the real world as you kill foes, and character advancement feels much more organic as a result.

There's still ample opportunity to specialise with traits which allow you to plough points into Markmanship, Skirmishing, Nature Magic, Beast-mastery and Wilderness Survival. This part of the progression system is very similar to the original Guild Wars and should lead to the same level of build obsession when it comes to competitive play.

Unfortunately, as we only had a dozen or so hours with the Beta build we didn't have enough time to sample 's dedicated player versus player or world versus world game modes, but we did meander through one of the WvW maps and it was massive. With five different castles allied to different colours, we could easily imagine hundreds



WvW maps feel and look absolutely massive!

"Character advancement feels much more organic"

GW2's landscapes could easily rival LotRO's for outstanding natural beauty.

THE POWER OF TURRETS

If there's one undeniable truth in this world it's this: turrets are awesome. Aliens showed us that and ArenaNet have reciprocated that fact. As part of the Iron Legion we took part in a quest which involved us fighting off waves of a ghost army with a trio of specially armed turrets. Our level at seven, the enemies we were fighting were at level 10, yet we still fought them off and collected a hefty XP reward to boot. This video is long, but if you watch it to the end you'll also witness how Guild Wars 2 approaches dialogue between characters. The 'talking head' approach isn't the most imaginative, but it works well enough and feels like a sufficient reward after lots of combat. There's also a skip option if you get bored.

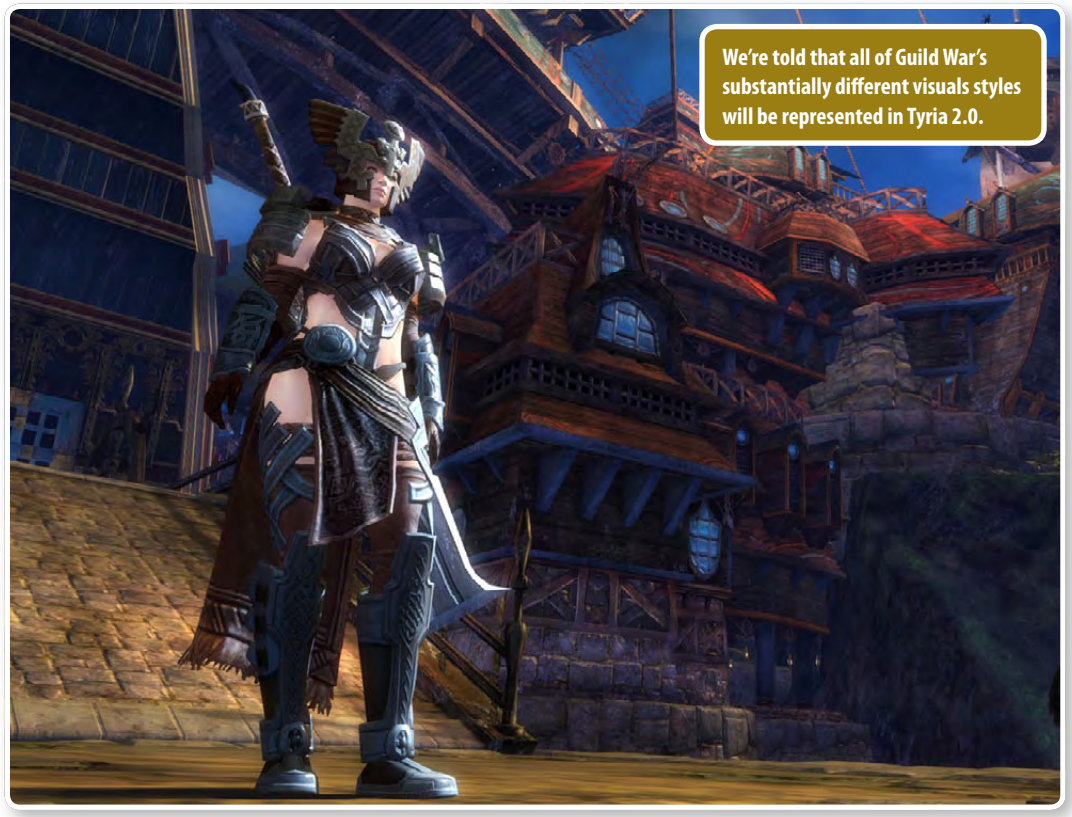
Guild Wars 2 cont.

of players battling it out using their own cunning and siege weaponry.

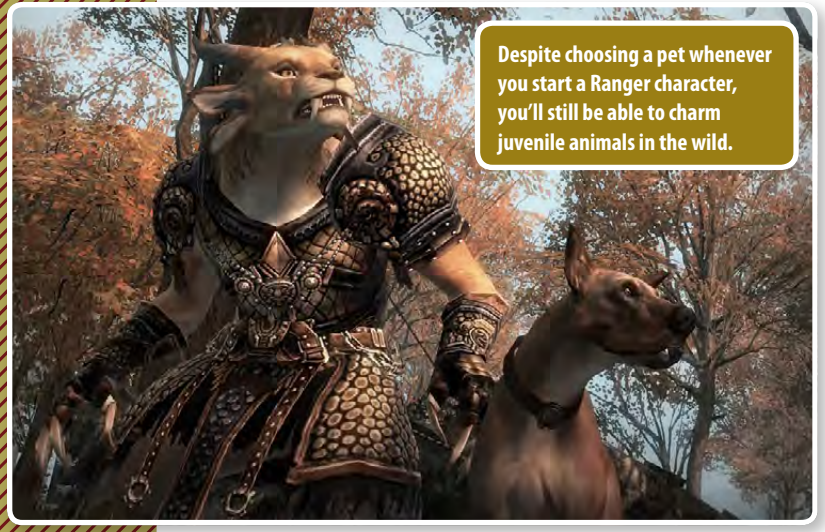
It was a real shame that we could only capture video and not screenshots of any of the in-game sights that we came across, as this new version of Tyria is absolutely stunning to look at and interact with. The highly instanced nature of the original Guild Wars now only exists in the story missions, with our Ranger tasked with putting together a new rifle to turn the tide of the ghost war. Other than those however, the world is entirely persistent with roaming bosses to hunt and location-based quests which involve fighting off hostile invasions, helping out with weapon tests and even saving fellow Charr from slaughter.

In the plainest of terms, GW2 makes you feel important in its world, but at the same time you aren't the centre of it. There's plenty of actions involving NPCs around you, which creates the impression that events are emergent and that you have the potential to witness something amazing whenever you venture out into the landscape.

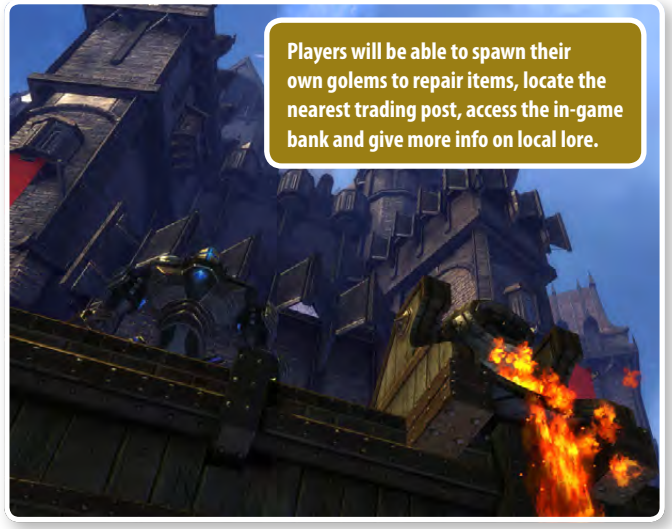
ArenaNet's sequel has all the elements which made the original Guild Wars so amazing, but layered on top of that are some great innovations which make merely existing in this beautiful, enticing world even more entertaining. During the Beta the Sylvari and Asura character options were still greyed out and the same went for the in-game store option. Aside from some optimisation issues, GW2 seems in very good shape. Expect to hear plenty more about this unique experience before release.



We're told that all of Guild War's substantially different visuals styles will be represented in Tyria 2.0.



Despite choosing a pet whenever you start a Ranger character, you'll still be able to charm juvenile animals in the wild.



Players will be able to spawn their own golems to repair items, locate the nearest trading post, access the in-game bank and give more info on local lore.

MMOZine Verdict

Set to be something truly special

HOW COMPLETE

70%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

95%

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Salem

"Oh what a lovely perma-death"

Publisher: Paradox Interactive
Developer: Seatribe
Heritage: Haven & Hearth
Link: www.paradoxplaza.com/games/salem
ETA: 2012

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Salem

Sandbox MMOs seem to be getting rarer and rarer nowadays, with established developers electing for a better understood carrot and stick approach to online-only game design. Yet where the 'big boys' are afraid to tread is often where indie folk get to make their name, with projects which throw caution to the wind in order to follow the creators' own artistic vision. Salem is one such endeavour.

As the name suggests, this Java-powered experience is set in 17th-Century New England, with players free to exist in whatever manner they choose. There's no over-arching plot or pressure to do anything you don't want to, instead you're free to make your mark on the world be it erecting buildings in your own village, hunting wildlife which roam the local area or, slightly more dastardly, kill anyone that looks at you funny.

Seatribe has created a persistent procedurally generated world which offers the ultimate in player expression, but in order to do anything – aside from walking around and eating – you'll need to invest in dozens of different skills which range from cooking, hunting, whittling, building, forging and other skillsets. You gain proficiency in all these things merely by eating the produce that spawns around you, but more exotic skills require different foods to be processed and combined. This classless system openly encourages experimentation and should curb the aggression of any wannabe griefer, as they'll need to not only work with others to establish a village and a working economy, but they'll need to invest in requisite skills before vandalising property or killing others willy-nilly.

With great power comes great responsibility (now, where have we heard that before?) and as a result Seatribe want to leave Salem's community to police themselves as much as possible – they merely provide the tools which accommodate player interaction. For example, let's take a look at how Salem deals with theft. If you decide to take another player's property or destroy it, you'll leave a clue, something dutifully called 'The Scent of Crime' which can be investigated in order to lead to the tyrant who wronged you.

Salem's visuals do boast a certain pastiche charm.

Crafting is a big part of the Salem experience.

Salem continued

From there you can do what you want with them – be it outright killing or stealing back the item – yet this aggressive behaviour will be accountable back to you via the same token. This kind of emergent gameplay is the stuff of MMO legend, but it's all here framed in a world that has lasting consequences.

Death is permanent and requires the player to roll another character, losing all the skills they've built up, but inheriting their previous avatar's property. If that doesn't sound crazy enough, every player character will always inhabit the world of Salem regardless if that user is online or not. Now you can safely fortify your avatar in a purpose-built home of their own, but it seems feeling vulnerable at one point or another is almost unavoidable.

You have to hand it to Seatribe as they've managed to emulate the fear and distrust of others in this historical period perfectly. Salem's Creative Director, Björn Johannessen, explained to us that players almost immediately began to fear outsiders when they commenced the Closed Beta, which led to testers forming village cliques in order to protect themselves. This sense of villagers being cut off from the rest of the world is further heightened by only offering localised chat between players

Despite spending most of their time outdoors, almost every character looks as though they desperately need a quick boost of Vitamin D.

HAVEN & HEARTH

If all this Salem nonsense looks familiar to your MMO-loving eyes, then you've probably heard of the super-niche Java sandbox Haven & Hearth before. That particular title was the debut project produced by Seatribe, and like Salem, its two Swedish creators have a strictly laissez-faire approach when it comes to handling their online community. Wars have been raged, villages have been wiped out, but it's been in the name of good wholesome isometric fun. H&H only has a thousand or so players at any one time but those who've spent some time with it have explained that it needs to be experienced in order to truly grasp how just immersive it is.

Salem continued

and a wilderness which contains witches and mysterious beasts. The endgame also involves players gaining enough skills that they unlock a new magical power-set, essentially making them a superstar in a world dominated by work and hard graft. We have no idea how this element will affect Salem's long-term appeal, but it definitely sounds like a game changer to us.

Currently the closed Beta is in full swing and Paradox Interactive has confirmed that this venture will be free-to-play, supported by microtransactions associated with clothing and skill perks. At this point you'll either be very interested in Salem or unashamedly bored, but that's to be expected. A distinct minority of gamers don't want to play a story, they want to make an impact in a world which they make their own via customisation, crafting and building, and Salem has all that. What we're really excited about though is seeing what kind of stories revolving around artistic expression and political betrayal emerge from this open-ended gameplay. Essentially, all of the intriguing interpersonal battles of EVE but without all that mining and commuting nonsense.

Whether Salem will be more interesting to read about rather than play remains to be seen, yet we're still very excited to see how Salem pans out. Who said MMOs were predictable?

"We're very excited to see how Salem pans out"

The village's annual facial hair contest ended with a controversial victor...

MMOZine Verdict

Unpredictable, yet very exciting

HOW COMPLETE

70%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

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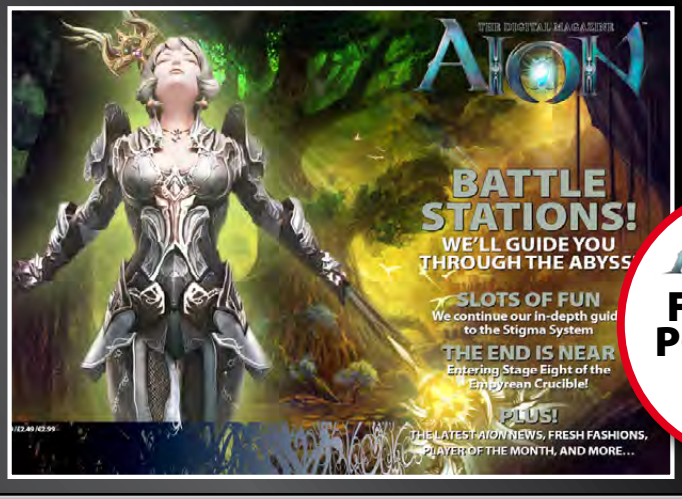
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END OF NATIONS

Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: Petroglyph Games
Heritage: Rise of Immortals, Mytheon
Link: www.endofnations.com
ETA: Autumn

End of Nations

Divide and conquer for no extra cost

"Eliminating base building from the gameplay equation means you're free to monitor what the enemy is up to"

Surrounding your tank with armour-boosting sandbags is one of many rechargeable abilities.

Long time readers of *MMOZine* will have seen a lot about End of Nations over the past year, yet each time we've seen the latest build of Petroglyph's innovative MMO RTS blend, we've always come away feeling energised.

The Texan developer hasn't shifted up the central RTS formula, with unit-on-unit battles still ruled by the traditional rock, paper, scissor tropes, instead it's the wrapper which supports this action which is so innovative. On a persistent campaign map, three factions fight it out for aggregated dominance in both single-player or four-player optimised co-op missions and PvP skirmishes which can cater up to 56 players in 28v28 matches.

During the latest preview op, we had an interesting match on a 1v1 map called Last Stand, which featured two players fighting off spawning AI waves on a walled-off map, with the last commander alive declared to be the victor.

Seeing as all unit selection is determined before the map, fighting battles feels more sedate than the constant click management required in other RTS games like StarCraft. Eliminating base-building from the gameplay equation means you're free to monitor what the enemy is up to, and aim to secure resource accumulating capture points with your dozen-or-so units. To further complicate matters, each of your vehicles, infantry, mechs or aircraft also has their own rechargeable special ability, be it a super-powered attack or defensive buff.

After our efforts were swiftly

PLAY TO WIN, NOT PAY TO WIN

In pursuit of creating an ideal competitive RTS environment, Petroglyph has stated that their store will only consist of vanity items and XP bonuses. Every mission in the campaign, every faction and every unit will be offered up for free to any End of Nations player, even if they haven't paid a penny. There will be the option to subscribe to the game and become a VIP but the benefits of that account type have yet to be confirmed.

Players also have the ability to call in support powers and deploy defensive structures to help them in the midst of battle.

END OF NATIONS

End of Nations cont.

crushed in the competitive comp-stop, we tried our hand at 12v12 on Operation Deep Hammer. As expected, this map was completely different to the last, as each team had their own HQ which needed to be defended from enemy attack. However, to throw more complication into the mix there's also two independent power plants which when downed shut off a shield protecting each team's HQ. Having this many to-and-fro aspects led to regular bouts of excitement as our 11 allies hurriedly communicated which flanks were exposed and where the main armies were hitting. It was at this point where the small unit cap makes sense, as you easily spot when two players amass their forces. Needless to say, we had a fantastic time in this match and we barely had enough time to mess around with the Warhammer-like customisation, which allows players to paint their own units, select different equipment and admire more extravagant units, such as walking mechs, before our play session was through.

EoN certainly wears its lineage on its sleeve and there's certainly enough here for old-school Command and Conquer fans to be happy with video introductions to missions, three story-based campaigns and an emphasis on fast-paced PvP action. It isn't just that though, it's also the chunkiness of the units and the soundtrack that seems to successfully imbue all those old-school Westwood tropes, but in a way that's fitting.

The camera allows players to zoom in close in order to feel more part of the action.

Before we went off on our merry way, EoN's Producer also let us in on their launch plan with an open Beta planned for summer and a full launch scheduled for autumn.

After seeing this MMORTS several times we have to say we're extremely eager to see how the game fairs once it hits the market, not only because we want to see what you guys think of it, but also because we want to play the bloody thing more. Thankfully we won't have long to wait.

MMOZine Verdict

Looking forward to readying ourselves for battle!

HOW COMPLETE

85%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

In MMOZine Issue 38

We get unprecedented access to one of the biggest MMOs of the year! Check out our in-depth preview next month!

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